

PRO LIFE CAMPAIGN PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2018



prolife
campaign

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INTRODUCTION

This submission is made on behalf of the Pro Life Campaign (PLC). The Pro-Life Campaign is a non-denominational human rights organisation, drawing its support from a cross-section of Irish society. The Campaign promotes pro-life education and defends human life at all stages, from conception to natural death. It also campaigns for resources to support and assist pregnant women and those in need of healing after abortion.

CONTEXT OF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

The PLC makes these remarks in response to the invitation by the Department of Finance for submissions from interested parties and as part of the ongoing engagement by the PLC in the improvement of supports and resources for those members of Irish society who may be facing challenges relating to unplanned or difficult pregnancies.

In particular, the PLC notes that the budget preparations must take account of the need for further work in the following key areas:

- Lone-parent support
- Bereavement care following pregnancy loss and peri-natal death
- Homelessness
- Pregnancy and Second/Third Level Education
- Mental health issues
- Adoption

LONE-PARENT SUPPORT AND POVERTY STATISTICS

In keeping with our submission to the new National Women's Strategy 2017 – 2020 ("National Women's Strategy"), the PLC re-states its strong belief that children of one-parent families are disproportionately affected in Ireland. Figures from the CSO show that the number of children living in consistent poverty doubled from 6% to just under 12% between 2008 and 2013, meaning that 135,000 children experienced deprivation on a daily basis. According to the CSO, 16.9% of the Irish population were at risk of poverty in 2015, this broke down into 16.9% of all males and 16.9% of all females. In addition, 8.7% of the population were living in consistent poverty in 2015, breaking down into 8.3% of all males and 9.1% of all females. According to Social Justice Ireland, as of July 2016, 750,000 people were living in poverty and almost one in five children were living in households with incomes below the poverty line.

There must be a concerted effort to improve this situation and offer a better start to children and their families. The PLC recommends an inter-departmental approach with the intention of bringing all families above the poverty line and out of the risk of poverty.

BEREAVEMENT CARE FOLLOWING PREGNANCY LOSS AND PERINATAL DEATH

The PLC follows its comments to the National Women's Strategy by re-stating the importance of the new HSE National Standards for Bereavement Care following Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Death.

Now that the new Standards have been set out, a detailed application across the health service in all appropriate hospitals and settings is required. This will involve the dedication of a ring-fenced implementation budget so as to ensure close operational monitoring and the guarantee of continued use of the Standards.

In addition, fully resourced training modules must be created and sustained with particular emphasis on the need to address issues surrounding antenatal and perinatal mental health care. This will especially apply in terms of matters arising on the diagnosis of a life-limiting condition for the baby in the womb where there can be the potential for mental health difficulties. This must also apply across all relevant medical grades and areas of expertise.

The PLC further urges the Government to provide funding to organisations already hosting vital services at a critical and often traumatic point in the lives of parents and their children. Groups like One Day More, Hugh's House and Every Life Counts are providing enormous assistance to the Department of Health by supporting families and the PLC recommends that their work is funded at this time so that it can continue at the highest level.

HOMELESSNESS

Once again, the PLC refers to its submission to the National Women's Strategy and notes with regret that a huge amount of work remains to be done to address the crisis of homelessness in Irish society. In particular, the phenomenon of homelessness during pregnancy has not been addressed in any meaningful way despite the announcement in 2015 by the Head of Medical Social Work at the National Maternity Hospital that there had been a major escalation in the number of pregnant women experiencing homelessness.

One Dublin city-centre refuge for homeless women reported a referral of 17 women to their services in the course of a single month in 2015. It said referrals to its service had almost trebled in the previous three years and it expected more than 50 women to be referred to its Pearse Street centre before the end of the year.

This crisis has not abated; on the contrary, it has worsened. Accordingly to the June 2017 Report from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, (and confirmed by Focus Ireland) a total of 7941 people were homeless for the week of June 19th – 25th 2017. This broke down into 2850 men, 2196 women and 2895 children. The number of families becoming homeless has increased by over 27% since June 2016 and 890 of the 1365 families were single-parent families.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LINK

Resources are urgently required in order to address this crisis. Evidence to date suggests that homelessness remains linked to the problem of domestic violence perpetuated against women which increases the need to ensure that funding cuts to refuge provision or other support services are halted immediately in order to avoid a "trickle down" effect into housing. In this regard, the PLC notes that over 12,500 people – 9,448 women and 3,068 children – received support and/or accommodation from a domestic violence service in 2015.

According to the Sonas Domestic Violence Charity, domestic violence played a role in as many as 25% of homeless cases in 2016. Furthermore, the link between domestic violence and homelessness makes it notably difficult to arrive at a true figure for homelessness as SAFE Ireland pointed out in 2016 that some 4000 women and children recorded by them as staying in emergency accommodation as a result of domestic violence were not being counted as homeless.

The PLC urges the Government to establish a dedicated inter-departmental unit which will prioritise the care of homeless pregnant women and their families as well as the reversal of capital funding cuts to existing refuge providers.

PREGNANCY AND SECOND/THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION

In its submission to the National Women's Strategy, the PLC urged the greater provision of subsidized childcare places for parents on low income in second/third level education. This suggestion is now repeated, as it is noted that the prioritizing of childcare on campus within Ireland's third level institutions will facilitate the continuance of education by younger parents. This will in turn enable them to reach a higher level of employment, with all of the accompanying financial benefits.

It is important at this juncture to highlight the need to increase assistance for the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) and the PLC notes that sufficient funding in this area will ensure that students are not prevented from achieving their educational goals due to a lack of funding. In this regard, the PLC recommends that any provisions contained in aspects of the TPSP should be removed so as to encourage students to return to full education as soon as possible. In particular, it is noted that some requirements of the Back To Education Allowance (BTEA) may pose difficulties for mothers under the age of 20 years who are in receipt of rent allowance and who must be two years' out of formal education before they can avail of BTEA. In order to avoid a break of this nature, it is recommended that a positive change be made to this requirement.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

The PLC notes that the issue of mental health continues to be of paramount important and recommends that all budgetary plans take the needs of women and girls into account. In its submission to the National Women's Strategy, the PLC highlighted the need for further work in this area, and set out a comprehensive review of the need to address current failings in this area. This call is now repeated. The PLC now urges the Government to carry out a full assessment of current needs and to ring-fence funding for the provision of the same level of high care both in urban and rural areas which will address all aspects of antenatal and perinatal mental health care.

In addition, there is an urgent need to address the phenomenon of post-abortion trauma and grief. State support for organisations such as abortion recovery group Women Hurt is vital to prove that the Government acknowledges this internationally recognised effect of abortion on women. The PLC recommends the provision of geographically targeted funding to provide the required services to meet the mental needs of all women in Ireland.

ADOPTION

Given the importance of adoption in the structure and family life of Irish society, the PLC calls on the Government to prioritise the need to simplify the adoption process as much as possible and in particular to promote the use of open adoption as a positive and life-affirming option during to pregnancy.

While the PLC welcomes the recent legislative work on the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016, it is noted with regret that the issue of adoption was not given the time it deserved during the recent, state-funded Citizens' Assembly where it received only a passing mention in the context of unplanned pregnancies. In order to address same, the PLC recommends that the Government hold a state-funded conference to consider the needs of parents hoping to adopt, with the intention of focusing on the concerns and experiences of those who have been through the process whether as parents giving their child a chance at a better life, or as members of the wider family. In such a context, the recommendations of interested parties can be given real consideration with the aim of eradicating any remaining stigma around adoption and ensuring that the process be made as transparent as possible.

Finally, the PLC recommends the dedication of funding specifically ring-fenced to the area of adoption so as to guarantee the removal of any obstacles that might militate against the continued improvement of services for the benefit of parents and children in Ireland.

September 2017

ABOUT US

The Pro Life Campaign (PLC) is a non-denominational human rights organisation, drawing its support from a cross-section of Irish society. The Campaign promotes pro-life education and defends human life at all stages, from conception to natural death. It also campaigns for resources to support and assist pregnant women and those in need of healing after abortion. The Pro Life Campaign was granted special NGO consultative status by the UN's Economic and Social Council in 2011.

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